

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 13, 2007

SANTA ANA RIVER PARKWAY

File No. 07-097  
Project Manager: Mary Small

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorize disbursement of up to two million seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$2,750,000) for three projects to implement coastal access along the Santa Ana River Parkway in Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

**LOCATION:** Santa Ana River Parkway, along the Santa Ana River in the counties of Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino.

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: Project Location and Map
  - Exhibit 2: Parkway Partnership Workplan
  - Exhibit 3: Orange County Project: Gypsum Canyon  
Road to the County Line
  - Exhibit 4: Riverside County Project: Hidden Valley  
Wildlife Area to County Line
  - Exhibit 5: San Bernardino County Project: Waterman Ave.  
to Alabama St.
  - Exhibit 6: Letters of Support
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et. seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the following disbursements to implement coastal access along the Santa Ana River Parkway in Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties:

- 1) an amount not to exceed five hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$550,000) to the County of Orange for alignment planning, environmental analysis, signage and completion of an

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engineering report for projects to complete a three mile coastal access trail segment that extends from the Gypsum Canyon Road to the county line;

- 2) an amount not to exceed one million eight hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$1,850,000) to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District for alignment planning, environmental impact analysis, signage, detailed engineering and permit applications for projects to complete a twenty two mile coastal access trail segment from the county line to the Hidden Valley Wildlife Area; and
- 3) an amount not to exceed three hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$350,000) to the County of San Bernardino for alignment planning, signage and environmental impact analysis for a four mile coastal access trail segment that extends from the Waterman Avenue to Alabama Street in the City of Redlands.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds to each grantee, the Conservancy's Executive Officer shall review and approve in writing a final work program, including a budget and schedule, and any contractors any grantee proposes to employ for the project."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with its January 24, 2001 Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, as updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the establishment of a system of public accessways to and along the California Coast.
3. The proposed project will serve a greater than local needs."

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

For more than fifty years, trail users and community leaders sought to complete the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway ("the Parkway") from the crest of the San Bernardino Mountains to the coast near Huntington Beach. The Parkway was designated a National Recreation Trail in November 1976. When it is completed, it will be one of the longest urban recreation and river parkways in the United States. The Parkway will be a multi-use trail, serving pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. It will connect a completed section of the California Coastal Trail to inland communities. The trail will go from the beach, through urban areas of Orange Co and the Inland Empire up to National Forest wilderness areas. The completed trail will connect three counties and 17 cities. More than seven million people live in the three counties that the trail connects and the Inland Empire is one of the fastest growing regions of California.

The completed Parkway will be about 100 miles long and it will include 18 miles of dirt multi-use trail in the National Forest and about 82 miles of paved trail along the lower reaches of the river. About half of the Parkway has been completed or is under construction. As shown in Exhibit 1, most of the trail in Orange County is complete although there is a three mile gap at the east end of the county, near the Riverside and San Bernardino County lines. There is a twenty

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two and a half mile gap in Riverside County from the western county boundary around the Prado Basin and through the cities of Norco and Corona. In San Bernardino County there are about 12 miles left to be constructed, primarily at the northeastern portion of the County connecting to the dirt trail in the National Forest.

The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Partnership (“the Parkway Partnership”) is a collaboration of the three counties, multiple cities and the Wildlands Conservancy, a nonprofit organization, created to coordinate building and administering the trail as a regional resource. One of the primary hurdles to completing the Parkway has been a lack of consistent funding for trail projects. Proposition 84 included a \$45 million dollar allocation to the Coastal Conservancy for projects to “expand and improve” the Parkway. These projects must be developed “in consultation with local government agencies participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Parkway.” The Parkway Partnership has developed a Work Plan (Exhibit 2) that lays out a strategy for completing the missing links in the trail over the next five years.

The proposed project will provide funding for planning and design work to complete thirty seven miles of trail in three counties. Each of the three counties will also spend approximately fifty thousand dollars for the design, development, fabrication and installation of consistent regional signage to demarcate the existing trail segments.

**Orange County**

The County of Orange has completed most of the Parkway from the coast to the boundary with Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. However, to connect Orange County’s trail and bikeway with upstream sections, the County must build three miles of the Parkway between Gypsum Canyon Road and the county line. As shown in Exhibit 3, this project is in the Santa Ana River Canyon, where the river is constrained between the Chino Hills and the Santa Ana Mountains. Highway 91 runs along the south side of the river further constraining the proposed Parkway. The three counties meet at a single point, just downstream of the Prado Dam. The proposed trail will cross from Orange County into Riverside County and continue through Riverside County around the Prado Basin.

While this section is only three miles long, there are a number of constraints that make completion of the trail very complicated and potentially very expensive. The County has identified six projects to complete this remaining section of the Parkway, including one road under-crossing and two bridges spanning the Santa Ana River. The proposed bridges will also connect the Parkway to Chino Hills State Park. The recommended authorization will provide funds to the County to refine the trail and bikeway alignment, develop conceptual plans, identify any needed right-of-way agreements, and prepare an Engineer’s Report for the projects to complete this gap.

The Resources and Development Management Department of Orange County’s Harbors, Beaches and Parks Division will oversee the planning project. This Division operates regional recreational facilities and manages 37,000 acres of parkland and open space including regional parks, wilderness parks, nature preserves, recreational trails, historic sites, and harbors and beaches.

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**Riverside County**

In Riverside County, fifteen miles of the Parkway have been completed from the San Bernardino County line to the Hidden Valley Wildlife Area. The proposed authorization would provide funding for alignment planning, environmental impact analysis, detailed engineering and permit applications to complete a twenty two and half miles of trail in the County. When constructed, this project will complete the Parkway in the County of Riverside.

This trail segment will begin where the Orange County project ends and continue east through the Green River Golf Course to the Prado Dam (Exhibit 4). Near the Prado Dam, the trail will cross under Highway 71 and continue around the edge of the Prado Basin. Planning for this section will be coordinated with the Army Corps of Engineers which is currently working on a project to increase flood storage in the Prado Basin by raising the face of the dam. The trail will continue through the cities of Corona and Norco. Above the Prado Basin, the Santa Ana River is a wide braided channel that migrates across an active floodplain. Planning for the trail in this section will be complicated because it must be balanced with natural resource protection and flood management.

This project will be managed by the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District which was created by the electorate in November 1990 and formed on January 29, 1991. The District is an independent agency governed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, which sits as the District's Board of Directors. The District manages more than 44,000 acres, including forty parks, reserves, historic or archeological sites and ninety miles of regional trails.

**San Bernardino County**

San Bernardino County has completed and opened two sections of the Santa Ana River Trail to the public. The first section extends from Waterman Avenue in San Bernardino west to La Cadena Avenue in the city of Colton (Exhibit 5). Construction on this section of the trail was completed in April of 2005. Our second section of the trail was completed on April 2007. The second section starts at La Cadena Avenue in Colton and extends the trail to the Riverside-San Bernardino County Line where it joined Riverside County's existing trail section. In addition to the National Forest trail sections, there are now seven miles of paved, multi-use Parkway completed and open to the public in San Bernardino County.

San Bernardino County will design a multi-use trail from Waterman Avenue to Alabama Street in Redlands (Exhibit 5). This section of the Santa Ana River Parkway is approximately four miles in length and will connect to the existing seven miles of trail already completed. The project will fund environmental studies and trail design work. This project will include designing three roadway under crossings, one stream crossing (Zanja/Mission creek) and a rail road crossing. The goal at each location will be design the trail to minimize permanent and temporary construction impacts to the river channel and adjacent habitat.

The San Bernardino County Regional Parks Department, a division of the county government, will manage and oversee this project. The Regional Parks Department operates and maintains nine regional parks including a historical silver mining 'ghost' town, a wildlife preserve and over eighteen miles of recreational trails.

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**Site Description:**

The Santa Ana River watershed drains approximately 3,200 square miles, including portions of San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties. The population of Riverside County is estimated to be slightly more than two million and it has increased by 30% since 2000. The population of San Bernardino County is just under two million and it has increased by 17% since 2000. The population of Orange County is about three million. Currently the state's total population is estimated to be 36.5 million; thus just under 20% of all the people in the state live in these three counties.

The Santa Ana River watershed supports hundreds of species of bird, fish and amphibians, including more than a dozen protected rare or endangered species such as Least Bells Vireo and the Santa Ana Sucker.

The upper portion of the watershed is in the San Bernardino National Forest, the middle section crosses the Inland Empire, through the urbanizing areas of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Throughout this region, the Santa Ana River is a wide, braided channel with flood control levees protecting the urban development. In some places, the river is a mile wide. The San Bernardino County and Riverside County projects will be built along these sections of the river. The Riverside County project will also include planning for a trail connection around the Prado Basin.

Near the western boundary of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, the river passes through the Prado Basin. The Prado Basin is a flood control basin, a habitat area and a water treatment wetland. The Orange County Water District owns 2,150 acres in the basin, which is in Riverside County, so that it can operate a treatment wetland to reduce nitrogen levels in the river water prior to using that water for groundwater recharge downstream. Prado Dam was built at a narrow point along the river, where the river flows between the Chino Hills and the Santa Ana Mountains.

Below the Prado Dam, through the Santa Ana Canyon, there is a short section of relatively natural riparian corridor, with natural channel bottom and riparian vegetation. Below this section, through most of Orange County, the Santa Ana River is a concrete-encased flood control channel which leads to the coast. The mouth of the Santa Ana River is between Huntington Beach and Newport Beach.

**Project History:**

Since the 1950's, citizens groups have worked with leaders in the watershed to develop a 100 mile trail running adjacent to the river. These efforts sought to create a lively parkway connecting playgrounds, schools, ball fields, commercial centers, golf courses, equestrian facilities and neighborhoods to natural areas with a linear trail along the river corridor. In this vision, the river parkway would be a safe, multi-use trail network linked to other parts of the watershed.

This vision for the Santa Ana River Parkway proceeded in fits and starts for over 40 years. Portions of the trail were developed independently in the three counties through which the river

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passed. Over time, local leaders in the watershed realized that a regional approach was necessary to complete the trail. A regional approach would allow the sharing of resources and ideas and development of a common vision for the entire trail. In 1990, the Counties of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange, along with eleven cities and various agencies came together to adopt the “Plan for the Santa Ana River Trail” which provided a road map for completing the trail along its entirety. The over-arching goal of the plan was to provide a continuous, multi-use, trail system along the entire length of the Santa Ana River Corridor. Over the next decade, efforts to complete the trail continued at different rates within each of the respective jurisdictions. Some moved forward but progress stalled in many jurisdictions due to lack of funds.

In May of 2005, with the support of the Wildlands Conservancy, a nonprofit organization, local elected officials and state legislators from the watershed met to explore the possibility of state support for the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway. At this initial meeting, Supervisor John Tavaglione of Riverside County, suggested development of a Partnership Action Plan to coordinate planning efforts and leverage funding and resources by local entities throughout the watershed. In August of 2005, the group determined that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was the appropriate vehicle to formalize their commitment and in July of 2006, a final MOU was signed and adopted by the participants including the Counties of Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority and the Wildlands Conservancy (see Exhibit 2.) The Parkway Partnership’s Work Plan lays out a strategy for allocating these funds, with the goal of completing the ‘backbone’ trail over the next five years.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$2,750,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$2,750,000</b>

Proposition 84 included a \$45 million dollar allocation to the Conservancy for projects to “expand and improve” the Parkway. These projects must be developed “in consultation with local government agencies participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Parkway.” Proposition 84 further specified that at least \$10 million of the Parkway funds would be spent in each of the three counties. Consistent with the bond language, the recommended action provides a planning grant to each of the three counties to prepare projects for implementation. The proposed projects were developed in partnership with the local governments participating in the development of the Parkway.

While there are no matching funds identified for these projects, significant matching funds have already been spent completing the Santa Ana River Trail. To date, more than \$50,000,000 in private funding has matched a total of \$15,000,000 from the local governments and approximately \$8,000,000 in federal funds. It is expected that the entire Parkway will cost approximately \$118,000,000 to complete.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed projects will help implement the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway which will become a major inland trail connecting to the California Coastal Trail. These projects are

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consistent with the provisions of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31400 et. seq.. Section 31409 states that the Conservancy “may award grants and provide assistance to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to establish and expand those inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail. “

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007  
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective F** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will develop plans for approximately 37 miles of trails and parkways along the Santa Ana River that will connect inland populations to the coast.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s January 24, 2001 Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, as updated on September 20, 2007, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy’s statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The Parkway project is widely supported by local organizations and elected officials, including Senator Diane Feinstein, Representative Ken Calvert, Senator Robert Dutton, Senator Gloria Negrete McCleod, California State Parks, the Counties of Orange, Riverside, and San Bernadino, the Wildlands Conservancy, the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, the Flood Control Districts of Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, Riverside Bicycle Club, Trails 4 All, the Riverside Land Conservancy, equestrian groups and others. Letters of Support are provided in Exhibit 6.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located along the Santa Ana River and will help to complete a 100 mile trail that will connect the Coastal Trail to the San Bernardino Mountains.
5. **Need:** As described above, there has been a vision of completing the Parkway for more than fifty years. During the last few years, significant political support and regional coordination was established with the goal of completing trail construction, Funding for trail construction is one of the key factors needed to complete the trail. With the funding allocated in Proposition 84, the Parkway Partnership believes they can complete the trail over the next five years.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Portions of the Parkway were designated a National Recreation Trail in November 1976 linking the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The National Park Service has indicated its interest in designating the entire

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trail, once completed, as a National Recreation Trail. When complete, it will be one of the longest urban recreation river parkways in the United States. Just under one-fifth of all the people in the state (approximately seven million people) live in the three counties served by this trail.

**Additional Criteria**

7. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The Parkway will provide recreational and transportation benefits to the residents of Orange County and the Inland Empire. The trail will provide urban populations with access to natural areas along the river, to the Coast and National Forests, and to many cultural and historical sites adjacent to the river. Trails development will be balanced with natural resource protection and flood management along the river.
8. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section, above.
9. **Readiness:** As outlined in Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Partnership Work Plan, the project partners believe that they will be able to complete the missing links in the trail over the next five years. Each component of the proposed project is ready to begin immediately and is identified as a high priority for completing the main trail.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** While these are the first Conservancy projects proposed in the Inland Empire, completion of the Parkway will advance the Conservancy’s long-held goal of increasing public access to the Coast. The proposed trail will provide bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian access to the coast. The trail potentially serves millions of residents within these counties. Completion of the entire trail will benefit previous Conservancy projects at the mouth of the Santa Ana River, including work at the Huntington Beach Wetlands.
11. **Cooperation:** The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Partnership is a unique example of regional coordination and collaboration among the agencies and stakeholders created by a Memorandum of Understanding. The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Partnership was created to coordinate building and administering the trail as a regional resource. The goal of the Partnership is to have the trail completed by 2012 with agreements in place to manage and maintain the trail cooperatively across jurisdictional boundaries in perpetuity. The Partnership is comprised of elected officials from Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, Cities within the watershed, Executive Officers from the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, and the Wildlands Conservancy.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project involves feasibility and planning studies and is therefore statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act under Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15262. The project may also involve installation of trail markers and signage. These signs will be placed on existing sign posts or at existing facilities and, as such, the signage is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act under Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15301. Upon approval, staff will file a notice of exemption for the project.